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ABSTRACT

To determine the effect of parental influence on students' reading achievement, a study surveyed parents of two eighth grade classes from two different middle schools in an urban area. The 18-item survey consisted of general information regarding parents and their children, and dealt with the parents' outlook on reading and their interpretation of their child's involvement in the reading process. Students' grade equivalent scores from the Spring 1988 California Achievement Test were collected. The test results were compared to the parent survey responses to determine correlations between parental involvement and students' reading achievement. Results revealed a low negative correlation between parental involvement and the reading achievement of their children, indicating that overall parental involvement in reading activities did not significantly affect the students' reading achievement but that parental knowledge of the child's reading skills and the school's reading programs did have an important bearing. (Twenty-six references are attached, as well as the parent reading survey.) (MM)

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

by

CAROLINE M. HART

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ABSTRACT

A survey consisting of twenty-one reading related questions was taken in order to determine what effect, if any, parental influence had on the reading achievement of their children. The California Achievement Test grade equivalent scores for reading of thirty eighth grade students in two urban schools were correlated with the corresponding survey responses of their parents. It was found that while there was no significant correlation between the two, parental knowledge of the child's reading skills and the school's reading programs did have an effect on reading achievement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Marie and Bill Hart, for their love, understanding, and encouragement; especially my Mom, who has been my inspiration since I was a child.

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

AND

READING ACHIEVEMENT

Learning to read is considered by teachers, parents, and the general public to be the most important educational objective for children. Yet despite this, "a significant number of children, even those whose intelligence is in the normal or above-average range, fail at or have great difficulty in learning to read" (Snow,1983). Teachers face demanding challenges as pressure for increasing children's achievement in reading continues to develop. In considering ways to improve achievement, teachers should give particular attention to the involvement of parents.

The crucial role parents play in the development of their children's intelligence is well established. Research also indicates that the factors associated with a child's parents, family, or home environment than do school-related factors (Coleman,1966; International Study of Educational Achievement, 1973; Jencks,1972; Mosteller and Moynihan,1972). Of great importance is the extensive research which shows that programs of parent involvement in education significantly increase the development and achievement of children (Andrews, Blumenthal, Johnson, Kahn, Ferguson, Lasater, Malone, and Wallace,1982; Becher,1982; Beller,1969; Henderson,1981. Since parents have been shown to be such a significant force in establishing the educability and general development of their children, it is important to investigate methods for improving parents' interaction with their children.

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement in 1987 printed a pamphlet focusing on reinforcing students' reading skills at home. It emphasized that parents should read aloud to their children, talk to them about their experiences, take them places, limit their television-watching, and take an interest in their reading progress. Children's success and interest in reading is said to depend largely on whether their parents converse with them and whether parents read aloud to them.

A review in 1986 by Becky Iden Miller focused on the effects of parental involvement on children's reading achievement and ways in which parents can help promote children's reading achievement. It was found that parents can also affect children's achievement by playing educational games, going to the library and viewing educational television programs with them.

Steven Silvern in 1985 and Elaine Lutz in 1986 presented a variety of parent programs, projects, and activities that have been successful in promoting reading readiness, receptivity to reading instruction, and increased achievement in reading. These included activities such as annual book fairs and a Reading Awareness Week, which has both the parent and teacher taking an active role. Reading conferences for parents were also mentioned as a way to determine the areas of reading for which parents need more information. A parent reading course was discussed which aided parents in learning how to work with their children at home, by describing family activities that

reinforce reading instruction, providing family book lists for different age levels, or giving an overview of the district's reading curriculum. This reading course was designed by Anthony Fredericks and David Taylor in 1985.

Research done by Jon N. Nebor in 1986 indicated that when parents take an active and positive part in their children's education the results often turn out well for the student. These studies showed that parental modeling will improve a child's reading because the child sees reinforcement of the value of education outside of school. Overall, the research showed that the more help a child receives from his/her parents, and the more prepared they are to help their child, the better the child's reading achievement.

By involving parents in the reading program, I feel that educators can not only foster a unity between home and school but also combat illiteracy--a growing problem in today's world.

HYPOTHESIS

Parental influence does not affect a child's reading achievement.

DEFINITIONS

Child - a boy or girl, most commonly one between infancy and adolescence.

Influence - the power of persons or things to produce effects on others, especially by indirect means.

Parents - biological, adoptive, or legal guardians who are nurturing the child.

Reading Achievement - attainment in any of a number of reading skills, habits, and attitudes; usually estimated by performance on some criterion measure, such as formal or informal reading tests.

ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that parents interact with their children on a daily basis.

It is assumed that parents realize that reading achievement comes through interaction.

It is assumed that parents will complete the survey as honestly as possible.

LIMITATIONS

Only a small portion of literature provides specific research information about the effectiveness of parental participation in the education of their children in the middle school.

DELIMITATIONS

The results of this study are limited to two public middle school classes in an urban area of New Jersey.

PROCEDURES

A questionnaire was developed to determine what role reading played in the lives of the parents who were involved in the project. The questionnaire consisted of general information regarding the parents and child. The questions dealt with the parents' own outlook on reading and their interpretation of their child's involvement in the reading process. Parents were asked to complete the eighteen question survey as accurately and honestly as possible.

A cover letter was sent to the parents who would participate in this project, requesting their cooperation and explaining the purpose of the study. The parents were also asked for permission to have their child's most recent California Achievement Test scores in reading used in the project. Two eighth grade classes from two different middle schools in an urban area were chosen to participate in the study.

Distribution of the cover letter to the parents and the parent reading survey took place on Monday, November 21,1988. The parents were asked to return the permission slip and the completed survey with their children to school no later than Friday, December 1,1988.

Tabulations were made of the number of responses given for each question, according to the following scale:

Yes = positive response towards reading

No = negative response towards reading

The percentage of responses in each category of this scale was recorded for the total sample. Percentages were derived by dividing the number of responses by the total possible responses (2) which could occur.

The questions were combined according to their subject relevance. Comparisons were based on:

1. The total percentage of positive responses of the total population for each of the 18 questions.
2. The percentage of positive responses to questions dealing with the child's home environment and availability of educational material in the home.
3. The percentage of positive responses to questions dealing with the reading habits of parents.
4. The percentage of positive responses to questions dealing with parents' knowledge of their child's reading skills and their school's reading program.

The YES category represented a positive result, which indicated that parents were involved and interested in their child's reading development. The NO category represented a negative result, indicating that parental involvement and interest was limited.

The grade equivalent scores from the Spring 1988 California Achievement Test of the two sample eighth grade classes involved in the study were collected. The results were then compared to the parent survey responses to see what correlation there was between parental involvement and the reading achievement of the targeted students.

RESULTS

Table I illustrates the findings in respect to the percentage of positive responses on the Parent Reading Survey for questions 1-18 when correlated with the corresponding California Achievement Test grade equivalent reading scores for the thirty eighth grade students involved in the study.

Table I

Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation between responses to Questions 1-18 and G.E. Scores

Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation
Students	6.29	1.70	
			-.30
Parent Survey (#1-18)	10.2	4.77	

As indicated by Table I, there is a negative correlation of -.30 with regard to the parent's overall involvement with their children and the subsequent reading achievement of these same children. The correlation is not significant.

Table II illustrates the findings in respect to the percentage of positive responses on the Parent Reading Survey for questions 1-8 when correlated with the corresponding California Achievement Test grade equivalent reading scores for the thirty eighth grade students involved in the study.

Table II

Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation between responses to Questions 1-8 and G.E. Scores

Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation
Students	6.29	1.70	
			-.04
Parent Survey (#1-8)	3.86	3.28	

8

These questions dealt with the child's home environment and availability of educational materials in the home. As indicated by Table II above, there is a negative correlation of -.04 with regard to the child's home environment and the subsequent reading achievement of these same students.

Table III illustrates the findings in respect to the percentage of positive responses on the Parent Reading Survey for questions 9-10 when correlated with the California Achievement Test grade equivalent reading scores for the thirty eighth grade students involved in the study.

Table III

Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation between responses to Questions 9-10 and G.E. Scores

Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation
Students	6.29	1.70	
			.21
Parent Survey (#9-10)	1.47	.900	

These questions dealt with the reading habits of parents. As indicated by Table III above, there is a positive correlation of .21 with regard to the parent's reading habits and the subsequent reading achievement of their children at the eighth grade level.

Table IV illustrates the findings in respect to the percentage of positive responses on the Parent Reading Survey for questions 11-18 when correlated with the California Achievement Test grade equivalent reading scores for the thirty eighth grade students involved in the study.

Table IV

Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation between responses to Questions 11-18 and G.E. Scores

Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation
Students	6.29	1.70	
			-.48
Parent Survey (#11-18)	2.33	3.70	

10

These questions dealt with the parent's knowledge of their child's reading skills and the reading programs in their school. As indicated by Table IV above, there is a negative correlation of -.48 with regard to the parent's awareness of their child's reading ability and the school's reading program. The correlation of -.48 is significant below the .01 level.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It can be concluded, from the results, that parental involvement with their children in reading activities as established in this study does not significantly affect the students' reading achievement. The Parent Reading Survey was divided into four categories, each dealing with a specific area of parental involvement. The parent responses for each of the eighteen questions were then correlated with the corresponding grade equivalent reading scores from the Spring 1988 California Achievement Test of the thirty students involved.

Although the majority of responses for questions 1-18, which dealt with the overall involvement of parents with their children, was positive, it did not have a positive effect of the reading achievement of the children. In many cases, the students with the highest G.E. scores were the ones whose parents answered the survey negatively. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is low negative correlation between parental involvement and the reading achievement of their children. The types of involvement indicated in the questions had a small negative effect on the

reading achievement of the students.

Questions 1-8 were concerned with the child's home environment and the availability of educational materials in the home. The responses for most of these questions were also favorable, but seemed to have little, if any, effect on the reading achievement of the students involved in the study. The negative correlation of -.04 is negligible at best.

The two questions in Category 3 represented the reading habits of the parents. Although this was the only part of the study which reflected a positive correlation between parental involvement and reading achievement, the results were apparently not significant enough to make a difference. Some influence is suggested, but the relationship is low.

The responses for questions 11-18 appeared to have the most negative effect on the reading achievement of the students. These questions dealt with the parent's knowledge of their child's reading skills and the reading programs in their school. The parent's lack of knowledge regarding the educational aspect of their child's life appears to be an underlying cause of poor reading achievement since the correlation was not significant. It could be said that 23 percent of the reading achievement of the students appears to be related to this factor.

While it can be concluded, from this study, that overall parental involvement does not have a substantial effect on reading achievement, parental knowledge of the child's reading skills and the school's reading programs has an important bearing. There are many factors which contribute to the welfare and development of a child, and since each child is a unique

individual, what is needed to motivate and enhance one child's growth may not necessarily work for another. Parents should begin to take a more active role in the educational development of their children. They should be made aware of the requirements set forth in the school system which must be met in order for the child to attain the next level of schooling, and become familiar with the levels of performances of the child on various reading skills as well as the reading program(s) of the school so as to have a more beneficial effect on the reading achievement of their children.

RELATED RESEARCH

The foundation for reading begins in the home. Children acquire knowledge before they ever go to school. They learn about things such as objects, events, thoughts and feelings and they develop the language skill and vocabulary to express ideas and describe their experiences. Parents play a crucial role in laying this foundation because of several factors. They guide their children through a vast and unfamiliar world of people, places, and things. They are the first to teach their children how to express ideas with words and what the words mean. Parents are also a lasting source of goodwill and encouragement that their children will become good readers. Once children are in school, their parents' expectations and the experiences provided by their parents, continue to influence how well children read.

In the report, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985), the National Commission on Reading suggested ways in which a parent could help their child become a good reader. They all stressed the importance of the parent's interaction with their children. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1987) reiterated those suggestions, which focused on reinforcing students' reading skills at home. They emphasized that parents should read aloud to their children, talk to them about their experiences, take them

places, limit their television watching while encouraging them to watch television programs that have educational value, and take an interest in their reading progress.

These practices were expanded upon by R.M. Becher (1982). One implication of her research was for teachers to remind parents about the differences between pressure and expectation and then to assist them in setting realistic short-term and long-term objectives for their children. Teachers can also help parents establish a system of rewarding their children for achievements in reading with such things as a trip to the library and a new book, in addition to generous praise. Another well-known, consistent research finding was that children with more positive attitudes and higher achievement levels in reading come from homes in which there is a wide range of reading materials available. It was stressed that the availability rather than the ownership of the reading materials was crucial.

Elaine Lutz (1986) also suggested the use of Parent Involvement Packets (PIP's) for reading improvement. This individualized program involves a special portfolio sent home regularly for each student. The teacher selects various activities and projects for home reinforcement, based on a diagnosis of the child's reading strengths and weaknesses. Included in each packet are games, puzzles, workbook exercises,, cassette tapes and individually selected books to share. Reading conferences for parents

were also mentioned as a way to educate parents as to how reading is taught in the schools. The parents are shown how to select books and magazines for adolescents, develop good comprehension skills, create a home library and foster good attitudes towards reading.

An inner-city parent involvement program based on research showing that when parents provide extra reading instruction at home their children's reading performance improves was discussed by Shuck (1983). The evaluation of this program showed significant reading achievement gains for children enrolled in it.

Steven Silvern (1985) completed a research review which identifies parental roles and practices that have been shown to promote reading readiness, receptivity to reading instruction, and increased achievement in reading. He also discussed intervention and involvement programs designed to expand or alter parental practices in improving children's reading attitudes and achievement. This study reemphasized the importance of parental roles and interaction with their children as a means of improving achievement.

Epstein (1986) stated that it is realistic for families of all children of every age to expect schools "to provide timely information, clear communications that can be read and understood, advice about how to help children who are failing, at risk of failing, or not measuring up to

potential, and other information on a regular and continuing basis." She also invited states, school districts, schools and classroom teachers to join the effort to develop and evaluate comprehensive parent involvement programs and specific practices that will help more teachers, parents and students. There is increasing agreement that relations between families and schools must be an integral part of educational programs. It is important that parents are involved at all levels of their children's schooling.

A review of the research on the effects of parental influence and parental involvement (Nebor 1986) on children's reading achievement indicates that when parents take an active part in their child's education the results often turn out well for the student. Studies show that parental role modeling will improve a child's reading ability because the child sees reinforcement of the value of education outside of school. Parents who read books and magazines as leisure activities are more likely to have children with a high degree of interest in literature and reading. Nebor concluded that the more help a child receives from his/her parents and the more prepared they are to help their child, the better the child's reading achievement.

Becky Miller's (1986) review of research data included 35 studies dealing with parents and their interaction with their children in various ways. Results of the review indicated that children's achievement can be increased through parental involvement and parent/teacher interaction. Completed parent attitude surveys revealed that most parents want to be involved in their children's education. Reading to children and listening to them read for ten minutes daily were found to be the most significant ways parents could increase their children's reading achievement. Other results showed that educating parents to guide their children's reading at home often increases children's reading achievement.

One of the most enlightening studies on this subject was E. Marcia Sheridan's (1981). Ms. Sheridan focused on Japan and why they have one of the highest literacy rates in the world. The first of several reasons dealt with the nature of the Japanese written language, which employs a dual code of ideographs representing specific objects and a syllabary, in which each symbol represents a separate syllable. The syllable symbols are read consistently (unlike the English language) the same way, and beginning reading students are taught the syllabary before they learn the ideographs. Learning syllables as a unit of pronunciation appears to be easier than learning a

phonetically based alphabet. Another reason is parental influence, as many parents begin to read to their children and give them books before they are one year of age. Properly taught in preschool, children can learn between 500 and 1000 syllable characters before they begin first grade. Japan's cultural expectations are also responsible for high reading achievement. For example, in contrast to male reading attitudes in the United States, the majority of Japanese boys perceive reading to be an appropriate activity. Although there is some evidence that the syllabary may be easier to learn than the Roman alphabet, the most powerful influences on Japan's reading success appear to be the intervention of parents and preschool education.

A study conducted by Margaret Gamble (1981) concluded that home environment was not significantly related to later achievement in reading comprehension. As the level of home support increased, there was not a corresponding increase in reading comprehension scores. There was, however, a positive relationship between achievement in reading comprehension and levels of income and education of the parent. Preschool programs were also a significant factor in improving reading scores.

Veronica Covington (1985) completed a study which examined the relationship between the amount of time spent on leisure reading, the number of books read, time spent watching television and seventh grade students' reading achievement scores. A random sample of 39 advanced and 32 regular reading students were surveyed as to their reading and television viewing habits, and their SRA composite reading scores were correlated. The results indicated that students with higher reading achievement scores watched less television and read more books than did students with lower reading scores. Results also showed that parents of advanced students read more often to them and provided them with more books than did the parents of regular students.

In the research by C.E. Snow (1983), it was found that there was "a significant number of children, even those whose intelligence is in the normal or above-average range, fail at or have great difficulty in learning to read."

In considering ways to improve achievement, teachers should give particular attention to the involvement of parents. Research also indicates that the factors associated with a child's parents, family, or home environment have a greater impact on achievement than do school-related factors (Coleman,1966; International Study of Educational Achievement,1973; Jencks,1972; Mosteller and Moynihan,1972).

Of utmost importance is the extensive research which shows that programs of parent involvement in education significantly increase the development and achievement of children (Andrews, Blumenthal, Johnson, Kahn, Ferguson, Lasater, Malone, and Wallace,1982; Becher,1982; Beller,1969; Henderson,1981).

In a study conducted by Iverson (1981) on the effects of the classroom and home environments on reading achievement, it was found that increasing parent-teacher contacts worked effectively to increase achievement in younger children. However, increasing parent-teacher contacts had an opposite effect on older children. This study contradicts what traditionally goes on in the average classroom.

The preliminary findings of Olson's (1984) three year study examining to ability of qualitative and quantitative measures of the home environment variables to contribute to the prediction of third through fifth grade students' achievement and growth scores in reading were similar to those of other researchers. Family socioeconomic status was positively associated with all students' reading growth and achievement. Parents' feeling that the school's greatest strength was the quality of its academic programs was positively associated with girls' reading achievement. The number of hours the parent spent away from home negatively affected all students' achievement in reading.

Hewison and Tizard (1980) studied the relationship between several home background factors and reading ability in working-class children, aged 7-8, using standardized tests and parent interviews. The home background factor which emerged as most strongly related to reading achievement was whether of not the mother regularly heard the child read.

The degree that home educational environment predicts reading achievement in a study of 253 educationally disadvantaged urban elementary school students and their parents was assessed by Dolan (1983). Results showed home environment was a significant predictor of relative and standardized achievement.

Correlations of home and school environment variables with the educational performance of 392 seven and ten year old students in Northern Ireland were studied in 1970 by Thompson. He found that home influences of parent behavior, home literacy, and educational ambition were more important predictors of intelligence and reading achievement than were school and neighborhood variables.

SUMMARY

Teachers face demanding challenges as pressure for increasing children's reading achievement continues to develop. Since the crucial role parents play in the development of their children's intelligence is well-established, teachers should give particular attention to the involvement of parents in considering ways to improve achievement.

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APPENDICES

Dear Parents:

May I ask you to take a few moments to answer the attached questionnaire? The questionnaire is part of my resource project in conjunction with my Master's Degree in Communication Sciences that I am studying for at Kean College. Your answers will be kept confidential and therefore, there is no need to sign it.

I would also like your permission to look at your child's most recent California Achievement Test results. I will be making a statistical survey correlating the surveys which you fill out and the reading achievement of the children. It is an integral part of my project, and, once again, all information I receive will be held in the strictest confidence.

Please complete the survey at your earliest convenience and return it, along with the bottom part of this letter, with your child. All papers must be returned by Friday, December 1, 1988.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Caroline M. Hart
Graduate Student

_____I do give my permission to have my child's CAT scores used in Ms. Hart's research project.

_____I do not give my permission to have my child's CAT scores used in Ms. Hart's research project.

_____

Parent's Signature

PARENT READING SURVEY

1. Does your child watch more than two hours of television a day? Yes _____ No _____

2. Does your child read books and/or other materials at home? Yes _____ No _____

3. Is there a dictionary at home? Yes _____ No _____

4. Do you have encyclopedias and/or other reference books in your home? Yes _____ No _____

5. Are books, magazines, and newspapers readily available in your home? Yes _____ No _____

6. Do you notice your child reading any of these on his/her own? Yes _____ No _____

7. Does your child bring home public or school library books? Yes _____ No _____

8. Is there a special place in your home for reading and studying? Yes _____ No _____

9. Do you read for pleasure? Yes _____ No _____

10. Do you read for information? Yes _____ No _____

11. Do you discuss with your child what she/he is reading and what she/he is doing in her/his schoolwork? Yes _____ No _____

12. Do you understand your child's reading program? Yes _____ No _____

13. Do you visit your child's school? Yes _____ No _____

14. Is it your opinion that your child has a reading problem? Yes _____ No _____

15. Would you like to see your child take reading in summer school to improve her/his skills?
Yes _____ No _____

16. Are you aware of the High School Proficiency Test which requires your child's passing reading, writing and math to receive a high school diploma? Yes _____ No _____

17. Do you feel you need to know more about the High School Proficiency Test? Yes _____ No _____

18. If there is a program to include parents as helpers in reading, would you be willing to participate?
Yes _____ No _____